

January was a busy and productive month for the Select Board.

The Budget

Our primary focus was the Town's budget.

There was an initial discussion of the Facilitation of Community Choices Committee's report and recommendations. This document will help inform budget decisions this year and into the future, and discussions about it will continue.

A special Wednesday meeting was held expressly to discuss the Town Manager's proposed FY10 budget, and a similar meeting will be held in February.

We were briefed on the state of the current year's budget through our newly implemented practice of receiving quarterly budget updates from the Finance Director.

As part of an effort to advocate for Amherst's interests in the State legislature, we distributed to local officials copies of a December letter we had submitted to Senator Stan Rosenberg's Special Commission on Municipal Relief. We wanted our friends at UMass and the colleges, on the Hadley Board of Selectmen and elsewhere to know that we are serious about encouraging support for legislation that would provide new revenue options and cost savings to our community.

Infrastructure Needs and Emergency Preparedness

To help address infrastructure needs, we approved a Road Project Repair Plan created by the DPW and Public Works Committee. This will help deal with the enormous backlog of critical street repairs. A funding plan and implementation timeline will be recommended by the Town Manager in March.

To educate ourselves and the public, we heard a presentation of the Town's emergency management and preparedness plans. This is a vital concern to municipalities, and we will have more discussions on this topic.

250th Celebration

We received a preview of the planned activities for the year-long celebration of Amherst's 250th anniversary, and approved a street closure for the February 13th Founders' Day event.

Town Meeting Preparation

To better meet all the preparation needs for the Annual Town Meeting, we changed its scheduled start date to Monday, May 4th. All reserved dates for Town Meeting are listed on the Town's web site (www.amherstma.gov.) Several Thursday sessions are scheduled, due to conflicts with some Wednesday events at the middle school. We agreed to sponsor a warrant article updating the Town's human rights language to include equal

protections for transgendered individuals, if such an update requires Town Meeting action.

Performance Goals for Town Manager

Much effort and discussion has focused on establishing clear FY09 goals for the Town Manager, to provide guidance and shared expectations, and to give the Select Board a concrete set of criteria on which to conduct his next annual performance evaluation. Though it is late in the fiscal year to be doing this, the process we create now will prove invaluable for the future.

Gaining and Sharing Information

Two Select Board members went to the annual Massachusetts Municipal Association meeting and trade show in Boston, attending seminars to learn about best practices, new ideas and shared challenges from colleagues across the Commonwealth. It was here that the Governor shared his initial announcement of mid-year local aid cuts and further reductions for FY10, in advance of releasing his budget on January 28th.

Efforts to increase access to information through the Town web site continue, with Select Board “packets” – materials related to each week’s agenda – now being posted at www.amherstma.gov/selectboard. Thanks to Kate Seaman in the Select Board office and I.T. Director Kris Pacunas for making this possible.

Licensing and Approvals

In our role as licensing authority, we granted two one-day Special Liquor Licenses, one Taxi Business and two Taxi Drivers’ licenses, and one Common Victualler’s license for a new restaurant. We approved four committee appointments and the installation of one new electrical pole. We also approved an order of conditions regarding a nuisance dog, which has since been removed from the area.

Town Manager Reports and Public Comment

We continue to educate ourselves and the public about key Town actions and activities through expanded Town Manager reports. These included application for Federal stimulus funding of infrastructure projects; meeting with Amherst College; the Hadley ambulance contract; a new fire department equipment grant; participation in a UMass-sponsored economic development panel about tourism; information gathering for a future fire station recommendation; the status of the Fourth of July Parade permit; updates on PVRTA funding and more.

We also heard from members of the public on a range of concerns including: closing of the middle school pool due to Federal drain legislation, public transportation and bicycle issues, enforcement of rental housing bylaws, and the number of cars in the Town’s inventory.